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Book Reviews

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Christian Fuchs, *Foundations of Critical Media and Information Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.

Christian Fuchs is an ardent believer in bringing 'Marx alive' and he does this through his meticulous critique of capitalist media's imperialistic role in promoting the digital divide in the information age (pp. 24–5). Fuchs holds that the behavioural patterns of the current monopolistic media have once again offered considerable space for reinterpreting Marx and other scholars of the Frankfurt school, such as Adorno, Marcuse and Negt, and their followers, such as McChesney and Chomsky (p. 71). His attacks on the false starts and pseudo-critique that, for so long, restricted both media theory and critical social theory, make a compelling case for looking at alternative media as a more democratizing force than the traditional media (pp. 20–3).

His argument on the role of the internet in current societies is well connected theoretically and presented in a critical manner from the perspective of Marx and Engels (part II, p. 7, part III, p. 8), with the suggestion that alternative media offer more intellectual space than critical media in a capitalist society (part III, p. 335). The book comprises three parts: theory, case studies and alternatives. Part I relates critical theory to modern information and media societies. Fuchs argues that media users and owners are locked in a conflict that resembles the one between workers and owners as described by Marx in his famous work, *Capital* (1976 [1867]). For Fuchs, 'The internet is a field of conflict in this power struggle' (p. 5). In the case of file sharing for example, 'the media industry tends to see file sharers as thieves of private property who negatively impact their profits and file sharers tend to see the media industry as exploiters of the cultural commons' (p. 5).

Fuchs then outlines the intellectual approach of critical media and information studies. He argues in favour of pushing back politically conservative approaches and instrumentalism in academia, and advocates for an academic system oriented towards societal problems and the advancement of participatory democracy (p. 17). He explains that his favourite model of information (cognition, communication and cooperation forming a triad) is comparable to the Hegelian triad of identity (being in itself), negation (being for another), and negation of the negation (being in and for itself) (p. 35). First, there is an individual aspect underlying the opinions formed by a person; then there is interaction, as the actor communicates with others concerning a specific question; third, there is action that aims at transforming social reality. Such transformations are again the foundation of the formation and reproduction of opinions so that a dynamic process of cognition, communication and cooperation emerges (p. 35). In Fuchs's cultural model

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(given as a diagram in p. 49), 'recognition' as a cultural process implies 'wisdom' and 'redistribution'. This is not just an economic process but a process that creates a participatory society by redistributing economic resources, power and definition capacities from dominant to oppressed groups (pp. 51, 72).

Fuchs draws clear distinctions between information science and media and communication sciences, stating that these have different histories and traditions though their topics of study overlap to a certain extent (p. 76). In the process, Fuchs attempts to use the term 'critical media' for 'media and communication' sciences, while trying to contribute some foundations regarding what 'critical theory' and 'critical research' could look like in both areas of study (p. 76). Fuchs realizes that the centralization of ownership and wealth results in the domination of national and international public opinion by a few actors who gain disproportionate influence on public institutions such as the media, education, politics, culture and welfare. He argues that if demanding partial capital expropriation through high capital taxation was successful, the material resources obtained could be used for supporting public affairs and for decoupling them from the interests of capital.

He therefore advances an approach that considers the media as reflecting the antagonisms of capitalism. Thus the media have an antagonistic character (p. 108), but also some potential for emancipation and repression. For Fuchs, in a capitalist system the mass media automatically have a repressive character as they take on commodity and ideological forms (p. 110). At the same time, the media have potential for alternative content production and distribution. Fuchs urges us to avoid media essentialism and to recognize the dialectical relationship between the media and society. Dialectical philosophy can help in conceptualizing this relationship (p. 112). The application of critical theory in the analysis of media, technology and information enables alternatives to technological determinism as it helps to explain the relationship between media and technology, and their connection to society, in a manner that avoids being one-dimensional and one-sided. Drawing an analogy between Marxian production of capital goods and media or information capital, Fuchs argues that media capitalists invest money in the production of media content and its transmission by employing labour that produces the media as commodity. This refers both to the content sold by the media to consumers and to the media audiences that are compiled and sold to advertisers. Media as commodities contain surplus value produced by their non-owners. The goal of the overall process is the self-expansion of money, which is the 'accumulation of capital' (p. 146).

Using this analogy, Fuchs questions McLuhan, Baudrillard and others as to their statement that Marx had nothing to say on the media, communication and culture (p. 155). He argues that Marx should be considered as a founding figure of critical media and communication studies and that his works can be applied today to explain phenomena such as global communication, knowledge labour, media and globalization, media and social struggles, alternative media, media capital accumulation, media monopolies and media capital concentration, as well as the dialectics of information or media and war (p. 155).

In part II, Fuchs discusses the relevance of Lenin's definition of 'imperialism' (centred on a 'nation-state' concept) to the current financial robustness of multinational corporations in Europe and the US. He argues that the accumulation of capital and the

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flow of transnational capital across borders (in both media and non-media industrial sectors) have led to the automatic re-engagement of Lenin's theory of imperialism and offers data (as case studies) employing the same empirical rigour that Lenin demonstrated (p. 176).

In part III, which runs for a limited 40 pages, Fuchs offers some hopeful alternatives through the construction of a typology of critical alternative media that distinguishes between critical form and critical content (p. 310). Fuchs advocates for the development of a counter-public sphere, the implementation of a participatory approach, the reduction of unproductive time of labour, as well as a more intellectual engagement of labour with societal issues and the extension of public discourse, changes which will provide a true meaning to the democratic processes of the media (p. 304). He identifies the internet as the sole medium for the emergence of large alternative critical media.

Fuchs has to be complimented for taking on the Herculean task of trying to revive Marx in a postmodern era, using Marxist critique as reinterpreted (p. 34) through the works of Fraser and Honneth (2003), Badiou (2007) and Harvey (2010). Theoretically, Fuchs may seem to be succeeding, but how far academia will be eager to embrace the vision of the non-competitive and participatory lifestyle that he advocates in this book is an interesting question. Furthermore, to accept Lenin's work relating to the media raises fundamental questions with regard to the historical applications of these ideas and their results (p.174). The book's theoretical and empirical grounding, and parallels between the current global scenario and Marx, Engels and Lenin's ideas that date back a century make the book an invaluable asset for all social science scholars in general and media scholars in particular.

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Kembrew McLeod and Rudolf Kuenzli (eds), *Cutting across Media: Appropriation Art, Interventionist Collage, and Copyright Law*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Cutting across Media is a very welcome addition to the evolving discourse on intellectual property issues in the arts. Its editors Kembrew McLeod and Rudolf Kuenzli, the former a respected commentator on intellectual property issues, the latter director of the International Dada Archive, have found a good balance between analysis of well-established collage techniques and the exploration of new contexts for theories of appropriation. The resulting anthology presents an extensive cross-section of critical perspectives on the intersection between creative expression and intellectual property

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